

Connecticut's Race to the Top Phase II Application

General Overview:

Connecticut's Phase II application is much tighter than the Phase I application. In many ways, the RTTT format is a reason for the disjointedness of our first response. Each section can be treated as an entirely new and distinct subject matter, with little opportunity to develop a narrative that will link them into a coherent argument.

However, Connecticut's approach with the Phase II application is the now a tapestry of well-connected reform initiatives. The content and information included in each individual section (there are 7 sections to the application: State Success Factors, Standards and Assessments, Data Systems and Use, Great Teachers and Principals, Turnaround Schools, General – includes funding, charters and other reforms, and STEM) is woven together to provide reviewers a complete picture as to where Connecticut's educational system currently stands and, more importantly, where Connecticut is headed through well-defined reform initiatives.

Connecticut will be seeking \$175 million in its Phase II Race to the Top Application. The vast majority of this funding will go to districts over a four year period to implement reform initiatives.

Background on Connecticut's Phase I application:

Although the state Department of Education worked extremely hard in assembling Connecticut's Phase I application, the submittal failed to achieve enough points to make the state a finalist for funding.

The process for Phase I involved a very detailed review of each application by five educational experts. Scores from the state's Phase I application are as follows:

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| State Success Factors | 88 out of 125 |
| Standards and Assessments | 62 out of 70 |
| Data Systems and Use | 29 out of 47 |
| Great Teachers and Principals | 95 out of 138 |
| Turnaround Schools | 35 out of 50 |
| General | 35 out of 55 |
| STEM | 0 out of 15 |

Areas for improvement based on the comments from the reviewers include: greater sign-on and support from some the state's largest municipalities; the need for an alternative route to certification for administrators; greater linkages and synergies between PK-12 and higher education – data sharing, evaluations, and student and teacher preparedness; greater support to school districts in terms of assisting their efforts to implement reform initiatives, better utilize data and train educators and administrators; greater state support of charter schools; development of a more robust effort providing opportunities related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); more efforts to engage parents, community leaders and others – especially as it comes to addressing the achievement gap; and better articulation or demonstration of efforts aimed at aggressively turning around failing districts.

Preparing for the Phase II application process:

While Connecticut fell short during Phase I, the state greatly benefited from going through the process. The comments provided by the reviewers have greatly assisted the state in preparing its Phase II application. Connecticut also benefited from the opportunity to review proposals that were submitted by other states during the first Phase.

Even before learning the outcome of the state's Phase I application, Connecticut began preparing for the next opportunity to showcase the state's reform initiatives. Over the past five months, the state Department of Education has hosted dozens of workshops and forums to build support for the state's next application and solicit input and ideas that would strengthen the reform package. In addition, the Department worked with legislators, educational associations and organizations, and others to craft a comprehensive legislative educational package to move educational reform forward in the state.

Highlights of Connecticut's Phase II application:

- ***Support and Sign-on:***

While Connecticut had more than 126 districts sign-on to its Phase I application, local teacher unions from a number of the state's largest municipalities did not sign on to the state's application. Only 60 local teachers' unions signed the first application. 130 local teachers' unions signed the second. The application also received more than 100 letters of support from education, business, parent and community organizations. The state's Congressional delegation has also written in behalf of the phase II application.

As the state completes its Phase II application, 163 districts and related education agencies have agreed to participate. This represents 82 percent of the LEAs eligible to participate. This includes Hartford, Bridgeport, Danbury, Meriden, New Britain, New Haven, Norwalk, Stamford, Waterbury and several other major urban districts.

The local unions in Bridgeport, Danbury, Meriden, New Haven, Stamford and Waterbury have also expressed their commitment to sign on and support this application. From the Phase 1 to the Phase 2 submittal the local union sign on increased dramatically from just 48 percent in Phase 1 versus 87.8 percent of local union sign on in Phase 2. As a result, our Phase 2 effort will reach nearly all of the students statewide (95.1 percent) who live in conditions of family poverty (defined in Connecticut as 185 percent or less of the Federal Poverty Level).

- ***Engaging all districts:***

In a number of ways, the state is providing more assistance to local school districts to assist them in moving reform efforts forward. Among those efforts include making the Department's Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) accessible to all districts – not just a select few, and every district, not just Title I districts, will receive funding from the state if Connecticut's is successful in Phase II.

▪ ***Framework for Change:***

The Department of Education has developed six levers for change that will assist the state in implementing the reforms sought by Race to the Top. The levers for change include: **family and community engagement; pre-service training and professional development; teacher/principal effectiveness and accountability; curriculum innovation and technology, including STEM; high school, college and workforce alignment; and financing sustainable change.**

Associated with these levers for change, the Department is engaging in an effort to continue the dialogue associated around educational reform here in Connecticut – but in a formal fashion. Toward this end, the Department has established a framework to foster stronger public-private leadership in the state focused on a holistic educational approach that will better prepare all of Connecticut's students for their future. The central pieces to this framework includes further development and greater utilization of the public-private Shared Leadership Council and creation of six public-private Partnerships for Change committees – each one to focus on the six levers of change initiatives.

▪ ***Educational Reform Legislation:***

Connecticut enacted legislation that positions the state to better compete for Race to the Top funding. More importantly, the component pieces to the legislation position Connecticut's students to better compete in the workforce.

Elements of the legislation include:

- Increased requirements – more credits with a focus on STEM-related coursework – for high school graduation
- Expands the capabilities of the state's Longitudinal Data System
- Creates an evaluation system linking student progress to teacher performance
- Provides the Commissioner of Education more authority to directly intervene in persistently low-performing school districts
- Establishes an alternative route to certification for principals
- Creates a mechanism – school governance councils – for parents and community leaders to participate in school reform endeavors
- Eliminates statutory changes limiting resources to charter schools and removes enrollment caps
- Provides for the creation of Innovation Schools in low-performing districts as a reform model
- Allows high school students to graduate early from high school starting in 10th grade upon the passage of a series of rigorous examinations

▪ **Overarching Themes to Connecticut's application:**

- Pace – state has accelerated the timeframes for fully implementing systems associated with the collection and use of student and teacher data
- Opportunities – state is fostering more opportunities to learn and grow in the school environment and be better prepared for their future. Examples include: more AP classes, more credits for graduation, opportunities for dual tracking – allowing students to take college courses in high school, early graduation,

earlier intervention with students to help them succeed and develop educational plans

- Partnerships and Engagement – formal creation of leadership around the levers of change provides a direct connection between student development in the classroom and college and workforce preparedness. In addition, much more parent and community engagement will now be possible and required to help turnaround and truly transform some of the state’s lowest achieving school. A greater voice for everyone in educational reform throughout the state.
- Creativity – state has created levers of change that will serve as a vision for moving reform initiatives forward across the state. These levers will closely align with the Race to the Top reform measures. In addition, a “knowledge network” will be established that helps to forge partnerships between P-12 and higher education’s research community.
- Data – state is aggressively moving ahead with completion of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System and this system will complement existing data tracking efforts to help facilitate data-driven decisions aimed at improving the learning environment. Efforts will also be initiated to better link higher education institutions that prepare in-state educators to teacher success.
- Support for Districts – state will provide more resources and assistance to help districts implement reform initiatives. Funding through the recently awarded School Improvement Grant will help a number of districts turn around low achieving schools. Resources will be provided to districts to help them implement data and evaluation systems and these efforts will be complemented by training and instruction.

Connecticut’s Race to the Top Phase II application is due June 1.